

Corser Hill Meeting House (First Congregational Church)  
Webster  
Merrimack County  
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-169

HABS  
NH  
7-WEBS  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CORSER HILL MEETING HOUSE (FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH) HABS No. NH-169

Location: Webster, Merrimack County, New Hampshire (Mail address:  
RFD 5, Penacook)

Present Owner First Congregational Church of Webster

Present Use Church

Brief Statement of Significance: A typical early 19th century New England meeting house with good proportions and a well-designed tower. Excellent Federal style details, such as Palladian window over main entrance.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Erected in 1823 by the Westerly Religious Society as the Second Congregational Church of Christ in Boscawen /Book of Accounts in Building the New Meeting house, MS vol dated 1823, NHHS Library/. In 1860 the town of Webster (formerly West Boscawen) was incorporated. On 3 July, 1868, it was voted by the state legislature that "The Westerly Religious Society in Boscawen may take the name of the First Congregational Society in Webster." /Laws of the State of New Hampshire, June Session, 1868, Chap. 109/. The land and church building is still owned by the same church.
2. Date of Erection: May through December 1823 /Book of Accounts..., p. 36/
3. Architect: George T. Pillsbury was master carpenter and contractor and presumably was architect /Book of Accounts, ...p. 36/

Builder, suppliers, etc: Joiner work was by William Abbot, plastering was done by James and Moses Fellows; Ezekiel Evans supplied underpinnings; Greenough and Pollard supplied oil and paints, B. Quimby supplied door stones; /Book of Accounts, ....., passim./

4. Original plans, construction, etc: Original plans, if extant, are unknown. Main entrance in gable (east) end. Frame construction. Square tower, open belfry stage of four segmental arches above which is rectangular "steeple" capped by rounded pyramidal dome and weathercock.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: The church originally had connecting carriage sheds. The building today is substantially unaltered from date of erection. The following are extracts from church records /Two MS vols, NHHS Library/
- 1830 - Cupboard made under the pulpit; roof mended
  - 1833 - MH painted in the spring (cost: \$180.69)
  - 1843 - MH repaired (cost: \$55.00)
  - 1844 - Pulpit remodeled
  - 1845 - MH altered to furnish a place for the stove
  - 1855 - Roof shingled; MH exterior painted; pews and floor painted; plastering whitewashed; porch painted; blinds put on windows (cost: \$432.30)
  - 1865 - Alterations in the construction of singing seats
  - 1868 - Two chimneys built on outside of west end of house (cost: \$150.00)
  - 1879 - Voted to remodel the gallery
  - 1884 - A chandelier placed in the church
  - 1920 - bell recast
  - 1930 - Electricity installed

6. Important old views: none known

- B. Historical Events connected with the Structure: Westerly Religious Society formed in September 1804 as the Second Congregational Church of Christ in Boscawen. Society incorporated 1811. First pastor: Rev. Ebenezer Price (1804-1837); second pastor Rev. Edward W. Buxton (1837-1882). The Meeting house was built because of controversies which resulted from the separation of church and state. Specifically, the question was who had the legal right to occupy the Old Webster Meeting House (q.v.) - the Christian Union Society or the Westerly Religious Society. The former won the controversy and kept the old Meeting house; the latter withdrew and built Corser Hill Meetinghouse.

C. Sources of Information:

Historical Sketch and Roll of Membership of the First Congregational Church, Webster, N. H., Penacook, N. H., 1908, 39 pp.

Charles C. Coffin, History of Boscawen and Webster from 1733 to 1878, Concord, 1878, p. 236 ff.

Willis G. Buxton, History Boscawen - Webster 50 Years, Penacook, N. H., 1933, pp. 95-100.

Church Records, 6 MS vols in longhand, N.H.H.S. Library

- a) Assessors Book of Records, 3 vols, 1804-60
- b) Church Records, 2 vols, 1804-69
- c) Book of Accounts in Building the New Meeting house, 1 vol, 1825

Prepared by: Charles B. Wood III  
N.H. Historical Soc.  
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**PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION.****A. General Statement:**

1. Architectural Character: Typical meeting house with tower and cupola over narthex end. Good proportions and well designed tower. Lack of much academic detail marks this as typical of rural craftsmanship.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good, well maintained.

**B. Technical Description of Exterior:**

1. Overall Dimensions:
2. Foundations: Large granite blocks.
3. Wall Construction: Probably vertical stud construction (frame not visible); lath and plaster inside, clapboards exterior.
4. Porches, etc. None.
5. Chimneys: Two simple brick stacks about 18" square on outside of west end, one on either side. These serve as smoke stacks for the wood stoves which are located in the east end (narthex) of the church, these being connected to the brick stacks by lengths of stove pipe which run longitudinally down the aisles. The stacks project about 5 feet above the cornice and are supported by iron stansion rods.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Door frames on east front are round headed; each contains a semi-circular fan light, the central one being twice the size of the side doors. Central doorway also has narrow vertical flanking side lights. Doors are six paneled, of the period of original construction. Central door is double.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Each long side of the bldg has 10 windows with 16 over 12 double hung sash; the wood frames are set close to wall surface. East front has large semi-circular window in "pediment", two round topped windows in second storey and Venetian window in center. There are no shutters.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Pitch roof, wodd shingles.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Simple wood cornice (Asher Benjamin's "Tuscan" order) around three sides of the building at the level of the eaves. Consists of cavetto, quarter round, box molding, and ogee (from bottom to top). East facade with raking cornice assumes form of pediment. No gutters or leaders.
- c. Dormers: None.
- d. Framework: inaccessible; passageway to loft kept locked.
- e. Tower and cupola: Over east end. Large rectangular base capped by cornice, balustrade with simple lath balusters and urns on each corner. This tower supports the belfry stage which is square in plan and consists of four segmental arches again capped by a cornice, balustrade and urns. Above this is smaller rectangular cupola-base decorated with four applied pilasters to a side, capped by a cornice, balustrade and urns and supporting the cupola - a four sided pyramid with curved sides. Atop this is a needle-like spire which supports a handsome wrought iron weathervane. Iron lightning rod runs from spire down to ground.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor Plans: Main floor is divided into nave and side aisles with center aisle running through nave. Original box pews with swinging doors painted to imitate graining. Narthex runs the whole width of the east front and is about 12 feet deep. It houses two stoves and two pairs of cramped staircases which lead to the gallery. The altar end (chancel) is raised in two steps but there is no built-in altar or pulpit. The gallery floor plan is in the shape of a horseshoe with open end facing the altar (west).
- 2. Stairways: Two cramped staircases in east end - one at each end of narthex; they ascend half way and then double back upon themselves.
- 3. Flooring: Painted wide boards; aisles covered with carpet.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster and lath walls and ceiling, all painted buff. Frame posts visible.
- 5. Doorways and doors: Three six panel doors lead from narthex into nave.
- 6. Trim: Rudimentary deniculated cornice on edge of gallery. Gallery supported by four Tuscan columns without bases. Otherwise no academic ornament.

7. Hardware: Mostly original; all doors hung on butt hinges.
8. Lighting: electric fixtures; chandelier in center of Nave.
9. Heating: Two wood stoves in Narthex.

D. Site:

1. Orientation: Main front faces East; altar in West end.
2. Enclosures: None
3. Outbuildings: Woodshed on northwest corner of church plot.
4. Walks, drives: Semicircular dirt drive in front of church.
5. Landscaping: Nothing of note.

Prepared by:

CharlesB. Wood, III  
N. H. Historical Soc.  
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